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Letter dated 9 July 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I should be grateful if you, in your capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of July, would have the document entitled "Issues for the open debate on the question of small arms" (see annex) circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Alfonso **Valdivieso**
Ambassador
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Annex to the letter dated 9 July 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Issues for the open debate on the question of small arms

Permanent Mission of Colombia to the United Nations

Colombian Presidency of the Security Council

August 2001

1. On 2 August 2001, the Security Council under the Presidency of Colombia will hold an open debate on the question of small arms. The meeting will be chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia and will be attended by the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

2. The purpose of this document is to provide other Member States wishing to participate in the debate with basic information that may serve as useful guideposts for their interventions.

A. Importance of the question of small arms

3. It has been generally recognized within the international community that the excessive accumulation and circulation and the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons pose a global threat to peace and security. The ready availability of small arms contributes to the intensification of armed conflicts and to increased levels of violence. Moreover, easy access to small arms is an obstacle to the negotiation and implementation of lasting peace agreements, impedes the development of a culture of peace and conflict prevention and hinders peace-building efforts.

4. The Security Council therefore has a role to play in this area, which makes consideration of the question highly important.

B. Objectives of the meeting of 2 August

5. The objective of the open debate proposed by Colombia is not to establish new definitions or understandings on the item of small arms, nor is it to introduce new norms and codes of conduct. This has been a field in which efforts have been made and initiatives taken at the global, regional, subregional and national levels that are outside the competence of the Security Council.

6. The open debate proposed by Colombia has other general objectives, which we will now briefly outline. The first is to provide follow-up for the question of "small arms" nearly two years after the item was included in the Council's agenda on 24 September 1999.

7. The second is to critically examine how this question is handled, specifically in those conflict situations that engage the Security Council's attention.

8. The third objective is to deepen the understanding of the issue within the Council with the express and active participation of States that are not members of the Council.

9. The fourth is to discuss the Council's contribution to the implementation of the Programme of Action that was adopted on Saturday, 21 July 2001, by the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, taking advantage of the momentum created by the Conference.

10. The final objective is to formulate a set of practical and workable recommendations that could be included in a Statement by the President of the Council or in a resolution that would define the participation and contribution of the Council in this area.

C. Participation in the debate

11. We invite the members of the United Nations to participate in the debate with suggestions and recommendations that would enrich the Council's work on the item of small arms.

12. We are aware of the large number of relevant actors involved in this question both within and outside the United Nations system. In the United Nations, the General Assembly and funds such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) play an important role. Outside the Organization, regional organizations, national and local authorities, private companies, civil society organizations and citizens of Member States, for example, all play important roles. The role of each of these actors should be discussed and defined in the appropriate forums.

13. Our initiative of 2 August is aimed specifically at the Security Council and at ways in which the Council can maximize its contribution to the question of small arms in areas that are directly within its competence.

D. Background to the item in the Security Council

14. On 24 September 1999, the Security Council included the item on small arms in its agenda, heard statements by the Council's 15 members — many of them represented at the level of ministers — and issued a statement by the President (S/PRST/1999/28).

15. In that statement, the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to "develop a reference manual for use in the field on ecologically safe methods of weapons destruction in order better to enable Member States to ensure the disposal of weapons voluntarily surrendered by civilians or retrieved from former combatants." The Secretary-General submitted the relevant report on 15 November 2000 (S/2000/1092).

16. In addition, the Security Council has made a number of generic references to the question of small arms in its consideration of thematic issues and, more specifically, in its consideration of conflict situations on the Council's agenda.

17. Generic references were made, for example, during the Council's consideration of items relating to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, children in armed

conflict, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, conflict prevention and peace-building.

18. More specific references were frequently made during consideration of sanctions regimes and, in particular, the question of compliance with arms embargoes. In addition, thus far in 2001, the issue has been raised during the consideration of, inter alia, conflict situations in Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone and post-conflict situations in the Central African Republic and Guinea Bissau as well as in Afghanistan, the Balkans, East Timor, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

E. Issues for consideration

19. The following are only some of the issues and questions to which the Member States may wish to refer in their contributions to the open debate on 2 August:

(a) *The content of reports of the Secretary-General.* What recommendations can be made for references to the question of small arms in the reports that the Secretary-General submits to the Council for its consideration? What important information must be contained in these reports that would allow more robust action to be taken by the Council?

(b) *Follow-up mechanisms.* How can sustained follow-up of the item in the Security Council be ensured? What additional value would a report of the Secretary-General have if it contained recommendations specifically directed to the Security Council?

(c) *The importance of highlighting the issue of small arms.* What is the true status of the question of small arms, particularly in those conflict situations that engage the attention of the Security Council? What concrete results have been achieved? What positive impact have these actions had? What were the problems and difficulties? How has implementation of peace agreements by the parties been affected by their access to small arms? What happens to small arms after the process of reintegration, demobilization and disarmament is completed?

(d) *Special briefings on the question of small arms.* In which cases would it be useful for the Secretary-General to give the Council a special briefing on small arms in connection with an item on the Council's agenda?

(e) *Strengthening of regional and subregional mechanisms.*[1] How can the Security Council strengthen and complement regional efforts to reduce the

[1] Regional mechanisms are in place in Europe, the Americas and Africa. In Africa, in particular, a number of initiatives have been taken that are important for the work of the Security Council. Of particular note are the Nairobi Declaration on the Problem of the Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa of 15 March 2000 (A/54/860-S/2000/385, annex) and its Agenda for Action of November 2000; the decision of the Council of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) of 13-14 August 1999 and its Firearms Protocol; the Declaration on Small Arms of the Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization (SARPCCO) Declaration on Small Arms; the Declaration by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) of a Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons in West Africa of October 1998; the efforts of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX) and its support for the organs of the Central African multinational force and early warning mechanism; and the Bamako Declaration on an African Common Position on the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons of 1 December 2000 (A/CONF.192/PC/23, annex).

availability of small arms and prevent access to them? How can a constructive dialogue be promoted with regional bodies for the consideration of this question?

(f) *Arms embargoes*. What can be done to guarantee compliance with arms embargoes? Would it be feasible to establish a panel of experts to review the question of small arms and to make specific recommendations?

(g) *Lessons learned*. What is the sum of lessons learned on the question of small arms? What practical and functional contributions is the Lessons Learned Unit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations capable of making?

(h) *Advisory missions*. Is it possible to dispatch, with the consent of the States concerned, advisory missions to examine the question of small arms in regions of interest to the Security Council?

(i) *Outcome of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects*. The debate of 2 August is taking place soon after the conclusion on 20 July of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, which Colombia has had the honour of chairing. Following intense negotiations, the Conference adopted a Programme of Action that creates new responsibilities for the international community. What are the specific responsibilities of the Security Council under this Programme of Action? How can the Council contribute to the Programme's implementation in those conflict situations that are engaging its active attention?